



# Global responses to child protection in light of COVID-19

An overview of promising interventions



## SUMMARY

In spite of the global socio-economic and health challenges arising from COVID-19, development partners, through national NGOs and community-based organizations have been relentless in their efforts to support children and their families to survive and cope with the new realities. From increasing resources, diversifying interventions or engaging multiple stakeholders, child protection actors have stepped up efforts to ensure children do not fall through the cracks regardless of where they are. This reader spotlights the work of Save the Children and UNICEF in sustaining child protection throughout the world.

**Keywords:** COVID 19, pandemic, child advocacy, GBV

*As the world grapples with COVID-19, child protection agencies are refusing to look on as their gains are undermined by a pandemic that does not seem to be letting up. Instead, these agencies are seeking new ways to modify their programming to ensure that it addresses the emerging needs of children and their families.*

## Save the Children Interventions

**Mali:** Child advocacy was executed through the Child Parliament which approached the Government of Mali to address the needs of children living on streets and children affected by armed conflict during the Covid-19 pandemic. The children also conducted a media campaign through TV, social media and WhatsApp to create public awareness. Children parliaments were supported by Save the Children which trained children in advocacy and child rights issues.



**Somalia:** Training of community health workers to sensitize internally displaced people settlements about protection from COVID-19, meeting people at wells, health centres and other public places.

**Ethiopia:** Save the Children partnered with religious institutions to develop and deliver COVID-19 awareness and protection messages to 40 million people.

**Sierra Leone:** Following lessons learned from the Ebola crisis where adolescent pregnancies dramatically peaked, and girls dropped out of school, the national policy was revised to allow teenage mothers to return to school. This is a big win for girls as it recognizes that they, especially, are at risk of gender-based violence during crisis and indicates key needs which should be anticipated and planned for example distributing food to these vulnerable girls to reduce dependence on sexual favours.

## **UNICEF Support to South Africa Education during COVID-19**

### **Case Study: Opening schools up better by expanding access to digital learning**

In South Africa, UNICEF has been focusing on integrating digital learning into its COVID-19 response through multi-stakeholder partnerships with the government of South Africa (the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and a digital content developer – 2Enable - to facilitate e-learning, through software apps on radio, television and the internet. This multi-pronged approach focuses on pre-school and primary school going children and is cautiously phased with children studying physically on alternative days and via digital on other days.

#### **Key elements of the digital learning process:**

- Regular dialogue between learners and the DBE to hear from children how they can best be supported; key findings are focusing on increasing access to devices and skilling children in using them safely.
- Leveraging partnerships with private sector actors to collate resources to support digital learning; for example the Lego Foundation was able to provide USD \$1 million to support home-based learning from early childhood to secondary.
- Collaborative development processes to ensure a best-fit approach where DBE, UNICEF and the Department of Social Development (DSD) worked together with teachers to build the online and app-based learning benefitting 7.8 million children.

Advantageously, the content is localized and contextualized for South African children with the support of Ubongo, a leading children's edutainment and media company, with support from the British Council.

- Digital coaching and skilling of 150,000 secondary students in the use of multiple technologies that have been popularized in the COVID-19 era, including robotics and other digital literacy tools. This skilling was supported in partnership with the University of Pretoria.
- Early childhood digital learning was enhanced through translation of digital content (based on the National Curriculum Framework) into 11 indigenous languages for 0-5 year old children. This was coupled with the development of a virtual resource for parents, caregivers and educators to provide ideas to support early learning through play.
- More comprehensively, UNICEF is supporting the Reimagine Education Initiative which aims at increasing wide accessibility to the internet and digital learning as a new way of learning for all boys and girls. The initiative is aligned to the Government's National Youth Policy 2020-2030 which is focusing on digital empowerment of adolescents.

**The key learning for the COVID-19 digital learning process** focuses on how digital learning, in spite of its good intentions, perpetuates inequality in learning, mostly due to lack of access to devices and data for the majority of children in South Africa especially those in rural areas. This hurdle is being addressed by focusing efforts on facilitating learning on mobile phones rather than computers.

Challenges also exist as it is not easy to measure reach and effectiveness of digital learning initiatives which is required to guide further development of content, improve education policy as well as assess learners.

## References and Further Reading

---

[https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17694/pdf/pan\\_african\\_policy\\_paper\\_8th\\_june\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17694/pdf/pan_african_policy_paper_8th_june_-_final.pdf)

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19>

<https://www.2enable.org/>

[https://aa9276f9-f487-45a2-a3e7-8f4a61a0745d.usrfiles.com/ugd/aa9276\\_778e848becb64cbb810829be24771d14.pdf](https://aa9276f9-f487-45a2-a3e7-8f4a61a0745d.usrfiles.com/ugd/aa9276_778e848becb64cbb810829be24771d14.pdf)

<https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/>

---

Developed and written by Joyce Tonda, Technical Advisor, Impact and Innovations Development Centre (IIDC). © IIDC 2020